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## ABSTRACT

Learning to write is difficult, especially for those beginning the process at the university level, such as dialect speakers of English and speakers of English as a Second Language. Recent pedagogical experimentation with external dialogues involving instructors and peers to provoke critical thinking have not been very successful. One explanation for this is grounded in the theory that the types of coherence underlying speaking and writing are different, one being interactional and the other being rhetorical, with the interactional not necessarily engendering the rhetorical. In dialogues, there are two interlocutors with roughly equal roles. By contrast, when one writes or rewrites, information must be organized hierarchically and logically as writing continues and as the topic dictates; the writer is in a more or less solitary engagement. This paper concludes that even early training in expository writing should stress rhetorical coherence. One way to do so is to make the reflective and critical operations explicit through individually-tailored cognitive induction. Such operations stand a fair chance of being internalized, permanently improving writing performance. This paper proposes a growth model of writing aimed at independence, suggesting the appropriate roles for both teacher and student in fostering cognitive development in learners. (Contains 24 references.) (Author/KFT)

## Developing Reflective Procedures in Learner-Writers<sup>1</sup>

by

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### Abstract

Composition research has demonstrated that learning to write formally is a cumbersome process, frequently not pursued to completion. The undertaking is especially difficult for beginners at the university level. To reduce the pain, recent pedagogical experimentation has engaged students in external dialogues with instructors and peers. It is thought that critical thinking could thus be provoked, and that the procedure would eventually be internalized. However, classroom experience and performance evidence are varied, and often do not support those hopes. One explanation is grounded in theory: the types of coherence underlying speaking and writing are different, one being interactional and the other rhetorical. The former does not necessarily engender the latter. This is so because during collaboration activities, thoughts are uttered aloud and responded to in dialogic exchange, wherein the interlocutors have roughly equal roles. By contrast, when one writes and rewrites, information is to be organized hierarchically and logically as writing continues and as the topic dictates, and the writer is, moreover, in solitary engagement. This paper concludes that even early training in expository writing should stress rhetorical coherence. One way to do so is to make the reflective and critical operations explicit, through individually-tailored cognitive induction. Those are the operations that stand a fair chance of being internalized, permanently improving writing performance.

### Re-evaluating External Procedures

Among comments frequently made about the daunting and frustrating nature of writing, the following one is especially down-to-earth: "[W]riting is usually an irksome activity and an ordeal to be avoided whenever possible. It seems to require an expense of effort disproportionate to the actual result" (Widdowson, 1983b, p. 34). The second half of that quotation is evidenced by the think-aloud protocols of experienced writers, who, in their

<sup>1</sup>In its early form this paper was entitled "Reflective versus External Procedures in Developmental Rhetoric" and presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for Applied Linguistics in 1996. It has since been revised, enlarged, and updated. Assistance provided in the form of a grant by the California State University, Long Beach, is hereby acknowledged.

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mental preparation for writing, use five or six times the number of words that finally appear in their essays (Bereiter, 1993, p. 35). Not unexpectedly, it is reported that inexperienced writers confine themselves to the lexical level, expending energies on the manipulation and choice of words to the extent that none is left for the true rewriting of their drafts (Sommers, 1996).

Part of the difficulty of writing lies, therefore, in the struggle to resolve the psychological conflict arising between presenting semantic content and choosing rhetorical forms in which to present it. It is known that learner-writers (henceforth learners) at advanced levels achieve that by embarking upon processes described as "internal dialectical" procedures (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1985, p. 314), in which semantic content is examined prospectively and retrospectively, via "procedural facilitations" (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1986, p. 791) resulting from various kinds of externally-induced support. By engaging in private discourse having the characteristic of internal "monologue[s]" (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1985, p. 310), they commit themselves to deep levels of contemplation as their products evolve, and in so doing, are able to transfer, step by step, such discourse into writing.

Among university students taking remedial or pre-baccalaureate writing courses, many are yet to be initiated to academic writing, and come from two groups: dialect-speakers of English and speakers of English as a second language. (The label *L2* will henceforth be used to cover both English as a second language and English as a second dialect). There is ample research documenting that such learners may approach writing differently from novice writers whose first language (*L1*) is English, since they face unique linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical challenges (Silva 1993, for example). Thus they should be taught separately. However, there is also the counter-argument that *L2* learners' problems in writing are not dissimilar to those seen in *L1* novices (Cumming, 1995, p. 376), and learners who lack *L1* writing skills tend to transfer that weakness to their *L2* writing: "People who write from . . . a knowledge-telling model in their mother tongue tend to approach writing this way in their second language, too" (Cumming, 1995, p. 379), as "writing skills form a specific kind of expertise that transfers across first and second languages" (Cumming, 1995, p. 376). That is, *L2* and *L1* learners have two goals in common: to develop basic reading and writing skills in order to be successful in various academic disciplines, and to acquire the rules of Standard English and overall knowledge of usage.

A corollary to the above is that, according to Scardamalia and Bereiter (1985, p. 308), what differentiates learners from advanced writers is that the former rarely adopt the kind of procedural facilitation taken up by the latter. And even when they do, for them those procedures do not seem to promote thinking and learning. That is, learners do not find that writing down ideas helps them, for example, in making the inadequacies of their writing apparent. In fact, beginners are ignorant of what constitutes formal writing, lack critical and

analytical skills, and write in "writer-based" prose (Flower, 1984). They also tend to be withdrawn and unresponsive (Kelly and Sweet, 1991, cited in Ignash, 1992).

In some cases, the search for a workable framework to teach basic writing leads to guided composition (Hu, 1997; Widdowson 1978, pp. 123ff);<sup>2</sup> in other cases process writing offers itself as a solution. The latter methodology is mainly collaborative, based on the argument that writing is very much a social activity in which writers improve and broaden their ideas through interaction, through participation in external dialogues in the classroom, the nature of which is similar to that of social conversation (Widdowson, 1983b). Students go through pre-writing tasks together, such as topic-selection, idea-generation, and peer-collaboration, and later on, individual revision tasks such as feedback and rewriting. Among the activities, student-student cooperation and teacher-student tutorials are considered particularly helpful in advancing the creative and thinking processes.

The reason why many professionals favour process writing is that it rests theoretically on the assumption that the ability underlying writing is similar to that underlying social dialogues, since writing and conversation are both dialectic in nature. There is nonetheless an important difference. A conversation is an overt exchange between two interlocutors, whereas in writing the exchange is covert, with the writer assuming the dual role of questioner and respondent. In process writing, it is argued that classroom dialogues encourage the kind of exchange of ideas inherently necessary in matured writing, allowing the writer to enter the mind of the intended audience and consider the text from the reader's point of view. Thus, through interacting with peers and instructors, learners are made aware of their shortcomings. That opportunity for learners to take a second look at themselves prompts the re-shaping of ideas. In time novices will learn to anticipate the questions that may be raised by their dialogue partners, and to appreciate others' perspectives at the same time. It is further theorized that they would eventually be able to internalize these dialogic strategies to the point of spontaneously playing the dual role whenever pen is in hand.

Unfortunately, there is little empirical evidence showing that this is how writing is actually learned--that novices assimilate external dialogues naturally and transform them into internal *monologues*, in the end gaining the ability to work independently. In fact, there is documentation attesting to the fact that process writing does not seem to be able to deliver what it has hoped it would (Johns, 1995; Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1985). What is more, justifiable criticism has been levelled at the validity and effectiveness of peer evaluation. Part of the reasoning is that beginners are ignorant of its procedures (Stanley, 1996), and that thorough preparation has to be given at the start of a writing course, to the extent of "approximately seven hours during the first four weeks of a fifteen-week semester" (Stanley,

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<sup>2</sup>For a positive view of sentence-combining exercises within guided composition, see Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1986, p. 797. For a short criticism, see Cumming, 1995, p. 383.

1996, p. 84), before peer evaluation becomes constructive. There have also been mixed reports on the usefulness of teachers' written comments on student drafts; they do not necessarily help send learners into reflection, or help them make needed changes during rewriting (Ferris, 1997, p. 331; Raimes, 1991, p. 419). Lastly, the benefit of teacher-student tutorials can vary widely from student to student: "[R]esults show that [tutorials] do not necessarily do what the literature claims they do--they do not necessarily result in student input" (Goldstein and Conrad, 1996, p. 184). Those observations lend legitimacy to the pedagogical concern that learners' writing, external dialogues, and teachers' comments might have become divergent voices each absorbed in itself. Differently put, for some learners process writing simply does not work as well as originally envisioned.

### *Emergence and Identification of Goals*

It is expository writing that is the standard in the academic environment. In teaching it, one of the concerns is how information learners want to deliver could be presented in a manner consistent with cultural and academic rhetorical conventions, emphasizing "reasoning . . . realized in a depersonalized and logically explicit language" (Jacobs, 1990, p. 153). Indeed, one of the most immediate of challenges learners face is that it is often a blurred line that stands between the semantic realm and the rhetorical realm. That is, the *what* and the *how* are not always clearly demarcated. Confronted with this, what learners normally do is proceed with "direct assimilation" (Bereiter, 1993, p. 169, italics omitted), in which the semantic information gathered from external dialogues is matched against their existing modes of knowledge and "fit nicely within" them (Bereiter, 1993, p. 169). Further, their written products are little more than narrative reproductions of that semantic input. Put in another way, instead of analysing and synthesizing, and finally presenting the information in an acceptable hierarchical structure (Jacobs, 1990, p. 153), novice writers tend to minimize their cognitive tasks by churning out somewhat incomplete transcripts of their external dialogues, adopting a strategy known as "knowledge telling" (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1985, p. 313, italics omitted). The purpose of the dialogues are thus roundly defeated.

It should be noted again that the claim, that the act of writing could model itself on external dialogue exchanges, is grounded on the argument that writing is a social process having a communication element which is interactive, similar in nature to social conversations. However, this is hardly the entire process. Writing is different from external dialogues in that an enormous portion of it remains a solitary endeavour, wherein writers have to apply themselves unassisted. Their anticipation of delayed effects from their presumed audience, and their readiness to respond to them, are precisely two of the factors which help sophisticated writers make out some of the emergent goals that they will have to sharply define sooner or later.

Certainly, the establishment of goals in writing is very much related to how much information there is to be transmitted, and how it should be transmitted. That is, the writer has to decide which parts of the totality of facts at his<sup>3</sup> disposal are to be presented, and in what order. As writing continues, should new information emerge, say, from recent readings, or re-emerge from remote memory, he would have to consider how accommodations could be made. Indeed, one major difference between experienced writers and the novice lies in how successfully educated guesses are used to filter content. Bereiter (1993) reports an experiment in which, given the same topic to write on, such as whether students should be granted the freedom to choose their subjects of study in school, novice writers "settle[d] on their main points in less than a minute of thought" (p. 35), whereas the more sophisticated ones engaged in topic evaluation, critical thinking, and reflective questioning, before finally putting pen to paper. The difference between essays produced by the novices and the advanced writers was that the former made straight-forward delivery of opinions, whereas the latter produced argumentative analyses, delving even into complex issues of educational policy, for example.

The reason that writers may approach the same topic differently is that they set different goals, depending on their stages of maturity. Broadly speaking, five levels of goals can be defined,<sup>4</sup> as follows.

- Level 1: jotting down main points related to the topic assigned, but not necessarily in order of importance
- Level 2: grasping the gist of all the information to be presented
- Level 3: placing the gist into categories and units, in accordance with importance or chronology
- Level 4: considering the potentials of different genres
- Level 5: defining the textual intentions to be conveyed to readers

The goals at level 1 are the most concrete and those at level 5 the most abstract, and "the more abstract levels incorporate rather than supersede the less abstract ones" (Jones and Tetroe, 1987, p. 42). Learners in basic-writing courses tend to operate at levels 1, 2, and 3. In other words, they set up safe, tangible goals and restrict themselves to a simple recitation of content. Those operating at level 1 work linearly by merely writing down ideas as they come to mind or as gathered from discussions with peers, or simply reiterate what they have read from texts. Level-2 writers are capable of differentiating the more important information from the less important. Level-3 writers are those who have a reasonably well-formed concept of topics. They are also able to present material in chronological order, following what is frequently done in narratives.

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<sup>3</sup>Throughout, the use of the masculine pronoun is generic and unmarked.

<sup>4</sup>Adapted from Jones and Tetroe, 1987, p. 40

By contrast, advanced writers, operating at levels 4 and 5, are those who set *both* concrete and abstract goals, during the pre-writing stage as well as during writing and rewriting. Among matters they reflect on is the relationship between content and anticipated audience. That means they ponder, among other things, how the material at hand can be presented most effectively. What is more, the stage of rewriting for them is a "[r]eprocessing" of information, a stage in which the preliminary content is subjected to cycles of "processing that [do] not simply add to what was produced before but transforms it" (Scardamalia and Bereiter 1986, p. 790). Thus, in this respect the instructor's primary concern is to help learners make their leap from level 3 to level 4, motivating them to progress from a linear perspective to a hierarchical one. In order to see how that is accomplished, one has to turn now to the distinctions between the type of coherence that underlies levels 1, 2, and 3, and the kind that underlies levels 4 and 5.

### *Interactional and Rhetorical Coherence*

The first type of coherence is "interactional" (Lautamatti, 1990, p. 32), being the ability to extract general meaning, for instance, from daily interactions and social conversation. It is a prerequisite for the second type, which is *rhetorical* in nature and very much related to thinking, speculating, interpreting, the making of value judgments, and is the type required in serious reading or formal writing. It is through this second type of coherence that one's familiar world, initially made available through interactional coherence, becomes meaningful from different perspectives. Although interactional and rhetorical coherence call for different "[s]chemata" (Widdowson 1983a: 34ff), i.e., collective mental arrangements of knowledge, in reality they are very much intertwined in daily living, in speech, and in writing. Thus the schemata can be said to be arranged in a cline, in accordance with intents and contexts (Lautamatti, 1990, p. 32). To over-simplify, at one end of the cline rests informal chit-chat, where interactional coherence assumes primary significance. (This is not unexpected, since common sense is an important element of day-to-day interactions, consistent with the goals at levels 1 to 3.) At the opposite end of the cline rests poetry, where form and meaning interlock, and the interpretation of which requires rhetorical coherence, which is associated with levels 4 and 5. Between those poles are various genres of writing, and the kind of coherence coming into play would be more interactional for journalistic writing, for example, but more rhetorical in the case of a report in, say, the subject area of physics.

### *Development of Self-monitoring Reflective Procedures*

It is academic writing that instructors prepare students for in basic-writing courses

at the university. Such writing is genre-sensitive, in the sense that the presentation of semantic knowledge is very much tied to the logical form in which it is presented (Jacobs, 1990, p. 154). The writing task is therefore best divided into two phases. The first is idea generation and extraction of information relevant to the topic given, accomplished through interactional collaboration resulting from external dialogues. The goals of those external procedures are those at levels 1 to 3. In the second phase, students prepare drafts based on the raw materials gathered. They make an attempt at formal written language and work towards a presentation with the goals at levels 4 and 5 in mind. In order to advance from level 3 to 4, learners must acquire rhetorical competence in addition to interactional competence. This is not easy. The dialogues that a group of learners engage themselves in, as a result of leading questions posed by their instructor, for instance, are interspersed with comments from other students. That is how ideas are exchanged in a classroom. More often than not they are *not* hierarchically presented, i.e., they follow neither ascending nor descending order of logical significance. What the learners have to know to be able to write adequately are procedures regarding *how* ideas thus generated could be presented in writing, but this they do not know unless they have actually been immersed in the procedures, and guided step by step. Here is where the dialectic process plays its part.

This author's belief is that the dialectic process should be introduced explicitly and continually, with the expressed intent of having it internalized in time. It is only by so doing that procedural facilitation can take place, that the learner can transform himself into an independent writer. How could such internalization be accomplished? One of possibly many means is an adaptation of Scardamalia and Bereiter's (1985, 1986) model of inducing assisted monologues.<sup>5</sup>

The best time to introduce such a procedure is during teacher-student consultations. The following briefly describes how assisted monologues can be induced in such a setting. Before the consultation session, the teacher should have read the student's work in draft form. Instead of putting down comments on the student's paper itself, however, he keeps them separately as his own notes, or as prompts written on cue cards. It is crucial that even for beginners the comments and prompts should not focus on grammar or spelling but on greater issues such as the defining and connecting of goals. Appearing for a consultation, the student is asked to read his entire draft once, silently or aloud. Experience shows that more often than not, he sees nothing wrong with what he has drafted. He is asked to read it again, slowly and aloud this time. At appropriate points the teacher may, based on spot decisions, intercede by asking a question, or by flashing a cue card on which is a question or comment that alerts the learner to any coherence gaps. It is expected that specific problems arising will vary from draft to draft, but teacher response would fall into two

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<sup>5</sup>What has been proposed by Johns (1996) to fill coherence gaps is another means, which does not focus on the development of assisted monologues.

categories: prospective and retrospective. The former type asks for the anticipation of reader reaction and the plotting of writing strategies. The latter type asks that interim consolidations be provided by referring to earlier points of the draft and making necessary adjustments. Both types remind the writer of the reader's perspective.

Cue cards are useful since each time one is flashed, the learner is forced to pause, read it, and reflect on its contents. In this way he is temporarily detained in the so-called "writing-reading feedback loop," where he is made, *in print*, to reconsider "not only . . . other people's perspectives but . . . [his] own perspective as a reader" (Bereiter, 1980, p. 87, italics omitted). Playing the role of reader himself, the learner would learn more about "how writing should be done," and would also "grow in [his] ability to respond critically and esthetically" to what he reads (p. 87).

Since the continuous flashing of cards is distracting, they should be used sparingly lest the flow of thought is interrupted excessively. As the learner gradually becomes familiar with the process, prompts may even be substituted for longer questions, and he may even be asked to pick out appropriate cards himself and match them against his mistakes (Cumming and So, 1996). The questions and prompts on the cue cards are similar in kind to those suggested in Johns (1996), Scardamalia and Bereiter (1985), and resemble those which would be delivered orally. Some samples adapted from Scardamalia and Bereiter (1985) are supplied in Appendix A. Appendix B is a demonstration of how those questions have actually been experimented with by the present author in one student session.

As noted above, a natural scenario for procedural facilitation to be introduced is the one-to-one meeting, where oral exchanges are *interspersed* with the flashing of cue cards at times the instructor deems appropriate. In other words, the ideal consultation is one that is controlled by the teacher's judgement of how best, at any given moment with any given student, to trigger thinking and responses to thinking, by means of questions put forward *in writing*. The benefit of using cue cards is that the teacher can start diminishing his interactive role, reducing intrusion, while the learner begins to learn how to write on his own by focusing on the setting of goals and on rhetorical coherence.<sup>6</sup> That is to say, by such a design the learner is guided, in as efficient a manner as the instructor could manage, to produce the best writing he is capable of. Where cue cards have been employed in tutorial sessions (Cumming 1995; Cumming and So, 1996), preliminary findings show that their use may be "most relevant to stages of writing where students are initially drafting their texts" (Cumming and So, 1996, p. 221).

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<sup>6</sup>Five purposes have been proposed (Cumming, 1995, p. 387; Cumming and So, 1996, p. 203) for prompts on cue cards: (i) goal-setting, (ii) choice of words, (iii) comparison between L1 and L2, (iv) grammatical and spelling rules, and (v) textual unity and coherence. This author has, however, limited cue-card use to the first and last purposes.

*Conclusion: A Renewal of Connection*

What has been attempted in this paper is to rethink certain theoretical and practical issues in the teaching of writing, and to report some thoughts on a pedagogical experiment resulting therefrom. The roles that teacher and learner could beneficially play have been examined. Among a writing instructor's responsibilities is the fostering of cognitive development in his learners, and one effort in that direction has been described. Proposed here is a "growth model" of writing aimed at independence, as opposed to a temporary-intervention model emphasizing the acquisition of immediate skills (Squire, 1983, p. 233). The long-term promise of the former suggests that it is a worthwhile approach to pursue.

### Appendix A

*Sample Questions and Comments Appearing on Cue Cards  
Used to Facilitate Assisted Monologues  
(adapted from Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1985)*

#### Prospective Variety

1. The title should give the reader a general idea of what is presented in the essay. It could more appropriately be . . .
2. Remember, the reader may not have read the article I am referring to. Briefly, its main ideas, in order of importance, are . . .
3. Do I agree or disagree with the author? Put in two groups my agreements and disagreements. (Why don't I agree with the author?)
4. I don't have enough ideas, so I have to read more on the topic.
5. Another idea that can support my argument is . . .
6. To support what I have just said, I have to give good reasons or examples. Some of them are . . .
7. Readers would expect me to provide a significant example here.

#### Retrospective Variety

1. Go back a little. A topic sentence that summarizes my ideas is . . .
2. I have put down many ideas. Now let me go back, pick the most important one, and start over.
3. Does this idea follow from the previous one? Go back to the previous sentences and reorganize my thoughts.
4. An important point that my opponents would raise is . . .
5. I should not give too much space to a trivial point. Could I condense it? Should I eliminate it?
6. Sketchiness will probably not help the reader understand my argument. Restated, and in one sentence only, my argument is . . .
7. How did I arrive at this conclusion? I should check my reasoning.
8. Why is this quotation here? Does it support what I have said?
9. This part of the essay does not support what immediately precedes it. Where should it go?

### Appendix B

What is reproduced below, verbatim, is the work submitted by a student. The italicized portions, enclosed in square brackets, are the questions and comments on the cue cards used by the author to induce the student's monologue. The student's exercise was written on George Orwell's essay "A Hanging" (from *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974, pp. 357-60).

Title: "A Hanging" [*The title should give the reader a general idea of what is presented in the essay. It could more appropriately be . . .*]

Paragraph 1: A Hanging by "George Orwell" illustrates what takes place during a hanging. The prisoner explains how it feels to be locked-up in cages like animals. He also explains the procedures before an execution the anxiety and or the tension. In the reading he refers to the cruelty of the guards. How they want to get the execution over and to go eat breakfast. [*Remember, the reader may not have read the article I am referring to. Briefly, its main ideas, in order of importance, are . . .*]

Paragraph 2: Capital punishment should not be allowed. [*To support what I have just said, I have to give good reasons or examples. Some of them are . . .*] This means we take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. America should be a land of equal justice and justice for all. [*This part of the essay does not support what immediately precedes it. Where should it go?*] I think that the prisoners suffers a lot before his or her execution. To me this is not justice for the inmate. In book it shows right before the hanging how the dog is trying to push him away from the hole. In doing this gave the prisoner a few extra minutes of life. In our society mankind determines our faith, and in my eyes no one should ever be allowed to their determine someone else faith. [*Sketchiness will probably not help the reader understand my argument. Restated, and in one sentence only, my argument is . . .*] If I had to witness something like this, could be a emotionally unhealthy for any one. This could be damaging to any to watch something this horrible. The only time I can close to watching some die was when I watch a loves pass right in front of my eyes. And even until this day I still have flashbacks of what occurred that night. Something like this will remain with you until your dying day. [*I have put down many ideas. Now let me go back, pick the most important one, and start over.*] That's why I think we should change what capital punishment consist of. So that a prisoner could just stay on death row until he dies that we can do away with execution because it is only a legal way of murdering another human. [*How did I arrive at this conclusion? I should check my reasoning.*]

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